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ON A NEW SPECIES OF BUSH-QUAIL (*MICROPERDIX*)
FROM GOALPARA, ASSAM.

By

W. R. OGIHVIE-GRANT,

WITH FIELD NOTES BY C. M. INGLIS.

(With a Plate).

Microperdix inglisi, sp. n.

Adult male.—Very similar to the male of *M. manipurensis* (Hume), but paler and much greyer, especially above; the black markings on the upper parts are much reduced and take the form of narrow bars which, on the lower back and rump, are mostly confined to the basal half of the feathers; on a few of the scapulars the black bars towards the end of the inner web are wider and, being more or less confluent, form irregular blotches; the chest-feathers are nearly uniform grey, with only rather faint blackish shaft-streaks; which become wider at the extremity, the middle of the breast and belly is paler buff, and the black markings are very much narrower.

Total length about 6·5 inches; wing 3·4; tail 2·0; tarsus 1·05.

M. inglisi, Grant.

Adult female.—Greyer than the female of *M. manipurensis*, especially on the mantle where the feathers are grey, and are merely margined at the tip with blackish and not conspicuously blotched with black as in *M. manipurensis*; the exposed portion of the feathers on the

remainder of the upper parts is also much greyer and the black markings, which are confined to the basal half of the feathers are hidden.

Total length about 6·3 inches : wing 3·25 ; tail 2·0 ; tarsus 1·0.

Habitat.—Goalpara, Assam.

This interesting new geographical form was first procured at Goalpara in the Brahmaputra Valley by Mr. C. M. Inglis who forwarded specimens to the Bombay Natural History Society together with a drawing. Mr. Inglis rightly believed the birds to belong to an undescribed form distinct from *M. manipurensis* and on this account Mr. W. S. Millard submitted the birds to me for examination and for comparison with the types of *M. manipurensis* (Hume). In the British Museum there is a ragged skin of a female *microperdix* which was received in 1893 from the Calcutta Museum and said to have been procured in Bhutan Doars. This bird is no doubt referable to *M. inglisi*.

FIELD NOTES ON *MICROPERDIX INGLISI*, BY C. M. INGLIS.

Whilst staying with my friend Mr. A. M. Primrose at Mornai Tea Estate in the Goalpara District of Assam, I had several opportunities of studying these birds and the following notes are compiled from my own observations and also from those of Mr. Primrose who kindly allowed me to use his notes. We identified the bird as Hume's Bush-Quail, but on my sending a sketch home Mr. Ogilive Grant said he expected it was a new species, and on my sending a series of skins they confirmed his opinion and he has paid me the compliment of naming it after me.

This Quail is, if anything, the commonest quail got in that garden, but on account of the nature of the jungle it frequents it is seldom seen and difficult to get. They are found in damp, dense ekra jungle which grows in the nullahs and when these get inundated during the rains they move into higher pieces of ekra and also into the sungrass. We have never seen them on absolutely dry ground except when feeding, at other times they keep exclusively to the damp nullahs. Our observations are mainly confined to the cold weather and up to April as after that the jungle is too heavy to walk through or have beaten. They are excessively local birds, only certain patches of jungle holding them and they frequent the same spot year after year. Although there may be, what appears to us, identical patches of ekra in the same nullahs and which one would think should contain these quail still none will be found in them. One very soon gets to know which patches are worth beating and which not. Many of these birds must get destroyed in the fierce grass fires which rage in that part of Assam during the early part of the year. A good method of getting these birds is as follows :—

A day or two before the beat takes place, burn patches in the nullah leaving those which contain the birds. This has to be done carefully. This thinning

of the jungle gives one a better chance, as it leaves the birds fewer spots to put up in when flushed and also fewer wounded birds get lost. Without doing this it is very difficult indeed to retrieve wounded birds as they run a lot and have a knack of getting over the ground at a good pace. A good dog or two would of course be of great service both for retrieving and putting up the birds. Burning the grass in front of one as one goes along is no use as the birds only run before or else through the fire and will not take to flight. They are usually seen in covies of four to six, but during March and April they get into larger ones containing from six to twelve birds or perhaps even more. On the 28th March, Mr. Primrose wrote that they were *exceedingly plentiful* and that he picked up four during one evening's stroll. He had hopes of obtaining the eggs but up to date these are still *desiderata*. The covies separate on being disturbed, some flying on ahead and others back over the beaters. They are not difficult to flush a second and even a third time with a sufficient quantity of good beaters. At first they rise straight up in the air and they go off with a straight steady flight for about fifty yards and then drop suddenly. This habit they have of dropping suddenly, often makes one believe that one has missed one's bird instead of which it is probably stone dead where it fell and also *vice versa*. On touching the ground they either start running at once or else if the beaters are close up they will squat. It is most difficult to spot them either running over or squatting upon the burnt grass for their colour matches that of the ash most perfectly. When they squat they sit very closely being sometimes picked up alive by the beaters. Their note is like that of The Painted Bush-Quail (*Microperdic erythrorhynchus*) and is often uttered when the covey separates. As far as we could observe males outnumbered females. Their food consists principally of seed. They very occasionally are flushed from the edge of the tea. We, on several occasions, came across covies feeding in the open on the burnt ground up to about mid-day and probably during dull weather they feed there all day. With fair luck and straight powder, two men, one taking each side of the nullah, ought to be able to account for every bird in it. Our biggest bag for a morning was eight birds, but that I am certain could easily be beaten in a place like Mornai. They are known by the name of 'Kala goondri' at Mornai Tea estate where all our specimens were obtained. Adults showed signs of breeding in the beginning of March and we were fortunate enough in obtaining a fully fledged young one on the 11th of January. This is shown on the plate accompanying these notes. This is, I believe, the first time the young bird has been obtained.

The colours of the soft parts are as follows :—

Adult—Bill, dark grey, base of mandible lighter and in some specimens this is tinged with yellow. Tarsus orange red, toes and back of tarsus lighter, claws light brown. Iris brown.

Nestlings.—Bill, upper mandible except base and lower mandible except tip dark greyish, remainder of lower mandible and base of upper mandible albescent. Tarsus fleshy, back of tarsus and toes yellower. Iris brown.